No. 65

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"That woman has no right to call herself his wife," he muttered to himself as his fist came down on the table in sudden anger. "And unless I am much mistaken, she has gone for good."

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IT WAS the second day after Lillian Crawford's arrival in Louisville. The two girls were seated in the cozy Wentworth dining room, chatting over their breakfast. Lillian's appetite seemed to have entirely forsaken her, for she would not eat any of the delectable food which stood so temptingly before her.

"But this won't do at all, dear," Miss Wentworth chided gently. "You must eat. There is really nothing to worry about now."

"Yes, there is," Lillian responded with her lips quivering. "I ought to have heard from Victor before this. He promised to write to me immediately after his interview with my step-mother. I am afraid she refused to give her consent to our marriage, and that there was trouble."

Margaret Wentworth uttered a laugh.

"What a foolish child you are," she said, reaching across the table and petting her young friend's hand. "From what I know about Victor Talbot, I believe him to be thoroughly capable of handling the situation.

"Your step-mother may be shrewd and cunning, but she is no match for a man of Victor's self-reliance and grit.

"Oh, Lillian," she went on enthusiastically, "you are to be envied to have such a lover. Talbot is one man among a thousand. I could trust him with anything.

"Ah, my dear child," she added, her voice suddenly becoming soft and almost melancholy, "I'd gladly give all the wealth I possess to be loved by a man like him."

Lillian Crawford looked at the speaker, somewhat surprised. There was a hint of tears in Miss Wentworth's eyes.

"You — you like Victor, don't you, Margaret?" she asked with a quick intake of her breath.

"Of course, I like him, but——"

"But what?" Lillian interrupted.

"Oh, nothing." Margaret took her napkin and wiped the suspicious moisture from her cheek. For a moment disquieting silence prevailed. "You—you must not jump at the wrong conclusion, dear girl.

"There is not the slightest chance of me ever falling in love with Victor. While I admire him greatly and respect him as a man, I could not even think of loving him."

Lillian breathed an audible sigh of relief.

"I—I am glad of that," she cried, running over to her friend's side and placing an arm around her shoulder. "I believe I should die if some other woman ever took Victor away from me."

"Why, it just couldn't be done," answered Margaret brightly. "And there is not the slightest chance of——"

The speaker's lips were closed with a kiss, and for a long moment the two girls sat with their arms about one another.

It was Lillian Crawford who spoke again first.

"Margaret," she said, lifting her chin. "Have you ever been in love?"

No answer was forthcoming. But Margaret's dropping head told the story.

"Margaret Wentworth, it is true. You have been in love," Lillian accused. "And you never told me about it. Oh, I am shocked. And you have broken the promise we made long ago to have no secrets from each other."

"Yes," Margaret admitted, burying her blushing face in her companion's shoulder. "I was desperately in love. It happened two years ago. But let us not speak about it. It was one of those dreams too beautiful to last. However, I have not been able to forget him and

probably never shall."

Lillian lifted the pain-drawn face of her friend and kissed the drooping lips.

"Please tell me about it," she coaxed. "You can trust me with your secret. It will do you good to unburden your heart. Go ahead, Margaret."

After the latter had regained her composure she wiped the tears from her eyes, settled back in her seat, and began:

"I met him for the first time two years ago at an art exhibition in New York. My mother, Guy and I, were standing before a picture whose subject caught us all. There was something so entrancing about it. Its title was 'The Outcast.'

"The painting showed the entrance of a castle, before which there stood, in wind and storm, a young woman with one arm raised in desperation, the other thrown around a man standing beside her, who supported her.

"His right hand was raised in menace towards the castle. What a remarkable face that was of the young woman! I can see it before me now; a world of sorrow, pain and triumph was in it.

"She was a cast out by her father, but went into the world with the man of her choice, poor, but immeasurably rich in love.

"I could hardly go away from the picture. While we were still there, a friend of my brother's came over and informed us that he was well acquainted with the artist. This was a young Frenchman by the name of Gerard Mirabeau.

"His mother was of noble birth, but following the call of her heart, had married a plebian—a great artist, and had been disowned by her father.

"Gerard Mirabeau lost his father in his early

youth and lived in retirement with his mother. He grew up and his pictures began to attrace notice in the world of art.

"He too, had become a painter like his father before him—and his aristocratic old grandfather wrote to him, saying that he would receive him and his mother and would make him his heir if he would give up his work.

"To this he answered that, in the first place, he would never give up his art,—that he belonged to it, body and soul. Furthermore, he could never honor, love or respect the man who had disowned his poor mother.

"In spite of all this, the old Count De Grandmont made numerous attempts to approach his grandson, but all his advances were repulsed.

"In New York, the young man's talent was at once recognized, and his success was assured. For this picture, "The Outcast," a beautiful young widow had been his model. She is said to have been infatuated with him, but he could see in her only the paid model.

"He was said to be very reserved and mingled very little in society, but whoever knew him intimately realized that his nature was a serious, noble one.

"While Guy's friend was telling us all this, he suddenly pointed to a tall man with a pale, interesting face and a pair of dark eyes which roved about in characteristic observation.

"There he is now, Gerald Mirabeau!" he said. "That's him!"

Here Margaret Wentworth paused a little and shadowed her eyes with her hand. The memory of that moment seemed to overpower her.

After a while she resumed somewhat huskily:

"I was thrilled through and through as I first looked into his dark eyes; it seemed to me as if they were

my fate. Mirabeau walked up to his friend to greet him, and he introduced us to him. He looked at me without the slightest interest, and why not?

"I am not beautiful enough to attract men, above all, artists! But I could not help gazing at him. His eyes drew mine magnetically.

"Chance would have it that, as I went on, he walked at my side. We got into conversation, and I felt instantly that he was interested in me. His eyes fell on me and never left me; he seemed to have found more in me that he had expected.

"After that we saw each other often. It was strange! In all the brilliant circles, where the most alluring women tempted him with their fiery glances, he saw only me.

"As soon as he knew I was present, he hastened to my side and rarely left me during the evening. Oh, Lillian, that was the happiest time of my life!"

Again Margaret paused. She struggled bravely with her emotions, but could not repress the tears that welled up in her eyes.

Lillian embraced her tenderly.

"Do not give up hope, dear," she said. "All may be well again. He will come back if his love for you was true and sincere."

"No, Lillian, that will never be!" cried Margaret passionately. "I have injured him too deeply. He cannot forgive me. Listen——" And she went on:

"People soon began to gossip that Gerard was courting me. I floated on a sea of happiness. One day, my father called me for a serious talk.

"He urged the Gerard was a foreigner and that, while he had undoubtedly a great future before him as an artist, his means at the present time were very meagre—that his position in society was a tribute to his

art, not to himself as a man.

"He urged me to keep this in mind before I encouraged him further. But I did not concern myself about Gerard's poverty or his position in society.

"After all, he was of good family, and there could be no opposition on that score.

"I considered no outside circumstance, and told myself that I loved him for what he was, loved him so much that I soon had only one object in life—to become his, and his only.

"The widow who had been his model for 'The Outcast' was working actively to ensnare him. They say that she actually intruded herself upon him at his studio to persuade him to let her pose as a model for a new picture, but she did not meet with success.

"He met her with cool politeness, but she did not desist, and did everything she could to show her inclination for him.

"I saw her one evening, and I must admit I was fascinated with her beauty. In reality she was even more beautiful than the picture. Oh, how insignificant and homely I seemed to myself!

"I could not understand that this transcendant beauty did not capture him, that he did not prefer this woman to me! I could not take my eyes from her, and my heart beat jealously at the thought that she had been alone with Girard for hours in his studio, and that he had been exposed to the power of her physical beauty.

"How could he, an artist, with eyes constantly on the alert for beauty, have remained cold! I considered it impossible. For the first time on that evening, I felt the tortures of jealousy.

"In this state of mind, in which we see everything in the worst possible lights, it seemed to me that there was a kind of comradeship between her and Gerard.

" 'No doubt,' I said to myself, 'he has loved her and perhaps still loves her, but why does he prefer me when he can have such a beauty!'

" 'Why so sad, Miss Wentworth?' rang his resonant voice suddenly in my ear.

"It was wonderful how he could look right into my heart and understand the slightest change in my moods. His enchanting personality had its usual effect upon me.

"I looked into his great, dark eyes which spoke his love to me, and was happy. I forgot about the beautiful model who was fighting for his affection, his love. I forgot the doubts which had assailed me.

"I felt that he was mine—mine with all his soul, and that, at a hint from me, he would confess his love. Did he suspect how greatly I longed for it?"

"Oh, did he confess?" interrupted Lillian, who had been listening in rapt attention, in breathless interest.

Margaret seemed not to notice the interruption, but went on reminiscently, a far-off look in her eyes:

"He suddenly took my hand, looked into my eyes, and, in a voice vibrating with tenderness and earnestness said:

" 'Miss Wentworth, when can I see you alone? What I have to tell you is not for other ears. I would like to lay my heart at your feet, I want you to know what is filling it, and then you will decide whether I am to be a happy man for the rest of my life or not. I put my fate, trustingly, in your hands. May I come to-morrow?'

"I shrank from the fire of his eyes. At last, at last, he had declared himself!

"My heart beat as though it would burst in its bliss. The greatest of happiness was mine: I could have cried and laughed aloud—my heart was so full.

"Stammering, I answered that I would await him in the afternoon of the next day. His beaming countenance, the pressure of his hand, raised me to the seventh heaven.

"Others now approached, but in the ecstacy of the moment, I wished to see or speak to no one, I wanted to be alone in my joy.

"I fled from the gayeties of the evening and withdrew to a window in one of the adjoining rooms, behind a curtain. I stood there, dreaming of him and the happy future before me.

"Suddenly I heard voices.

"Two ladies had entered the room and seated themselves on a divan not far from where I was standing. They could not see me, as I was entirely hidden by the curtain.

" 'Mrs. Wallace is just ravishing to-night,' said one. 'The men are simply crazy about her.'

"I listened. Mrs Wallace! That was the name of the widow who had been Gerard's model, of whom I had been so jealous!

" 'She could have married time and again, and could have had the pick of society,' answered the other. 'She has any number of admirers. If she were wise, she would accept Mr. Marshall, the banker; all his wealth would be at her command. But she will not do it. She is infatuated with Mirabeau, and in the end will ruin herself.'

" 'But why doesn't he take her? They say that she sat for him, and that she was soon to be his wife,' said the first.

" 'Why, don't you know that she is as poor as a church mouse, that all she has is her pretty face?' laughed the other. 'What can Mirabeau do with that. He is but a poor devil himself, and has to support his

mother.

" 'Besides, I have heard that he is in debt. My goodness, if he were to marry Mrs. Wallace, they would starve. She has such extravagant notions, he could never satisfy her!

" 'There is no doubt that he cares for her. Any child can see that, but he is wise enough not to commit such a folly. On the contrary, he is well on the way to catch a rich wife, and he is right.'

" 'You don't say so!' came back. 'Whom is he courting?'

" 'Don't you know? Why, Miss Wentworth. She is just wild about him. She is not at all pretty, and for an artist, probably not very attractive—but her money surely is.

" 'She will come into a big fortune some time or other, and Mirabeau can use it. Oh yes, poor Mrs. Wallace will have to give up her Gerard——"

Margaret could not continue. A sob choked her voice. In the recollection of that hour, she suffered anew all the tortures she had experienced.

Chapter 214

SORROW AND JOY.

A LONG SPACE of unhappy silence had fallen between the two young women. Margaret Wentworth was living over again the unhappy days of long ago. Occasionally Lillian Crawford stole a glance at her. Finally the latter spoke with a world of tender sympathy in her voice.

"My poor, dear Margaret, how they have hurt you," she said softly, caressing the weeping girl. "Oh, these cruel, cruel gossiping women, how they can destroy the happiness of others!"

"But they did not know I heard them," interposed Margaret between her tears. "What more they said, or when they left the room, I do not konw. I was dazed by the blow. I saw all my happiness shattered. At last I got up.

"As I passed a mirror and saw my reflection, I was frightened at my own pale face. In the assembly room my brother came to me and asked if I felt unwell. I passed him without answering, I hardly understood what he said.

"Suddenly Gerard espied me. He came quickly to me and took my hand.

" 'Margaret!' he cried. 'For heaven's sake, what is the matter with you?'

"I tried to pass him, but he would not let me. He took a hold of my arm.

" 'What has happened?' he demanded. 'How pale you are!"

"I laughed so shrill and strange, that it sounded

as if something within me had burst.

"I looked at him with horror, and almost shrieked out:

" 'Gerard Mirabeau, you have deceived me! You have declared your love for me while you love Mrs. Wallace! I know all now! You need an heiress and have made me believe that you love me. Is this the act of an honorable man?'

"I hardly knew what I said; I was almost mad with grief and desperation. I only felt that I must hurt him—hurt him as he had hurt me—and show him how much I despised him!

"Gerard grew white as a sheet. Not a word did he say, only his eyes stared into mine in bewilderment and pain.

"The look which he gave me I will never, never forget . The scales fell from my eyes. Like a flash of lightning I realized that he had not deceived me—that he was honorable and loved me for myself.

"Without saying a word to me, he turned and left me. He was too proud to defend himself.

"When I awoke at last to the fact that he had left me, I hurried after him, dstracted, almost out of my mind. I wanted to call him back, but I could not find him anywhere; he had already left the house.

"I managed to drag myself to the cloak-room and there fell in a heap, unconscious.

"I was very ill for a long time and when at last I recovered, I heard some time later, that Gerard had gone to Canada, Quebec, to settle down there. Oh, it must have been hard for him to bear the suffering I had inflicted upon him!

"You often used to wonder, Lillian, what had so entirely changed me; what had made me so different.

"All my youth and high spirits are buried now;

there is no real joy or pleasure in life for me, because I cannot forget him — because I love him still!"

Margaret Wentworth stopped speaking for some moments. It was hard to voice her trouble even to her dearest friend. And, indeed, what she had said about her lost youth was in truth very evident.

The poor girl had become wasted and wan, for her memory kept harping on the name of Gerard Mirabeau.

An elegy over the past still rang constantly in her ear. An inward cry haunted and harassed her. The heaviness of a broken spirit and of pining settled slowly on her buoyant youth.

"But, you hear of him sometimes, don't you, Margaret?" asked Lillian softly.

"Yes," replied Margaret. "I hear of him now, from time to time. He has become a great artist and his pictures are eagerly sought after. Notwithstanding the little fortune he must have already acquired, I understand he still lives a very retired and simple existence with his mother.

"He did not marry Mrs. Wallace, although she spent some time in Quebec with acquaintances so as to be near him. Only a short time ago the much-admired widow became the wife of a wealthy old man.

"You can understand now, Lillian, that I find no more pleasure in society; that everyone seems dull and uninteresting to me, while this dreadful ache in my heart continues to torture me.

"I cannot—cannot forget Gerard, my love for him was too deep! But my greatest grief is that it was entirely through my fault that our precious happiness was destroyed.

"Dick Barlow, my brother's friend, who had introduced me to Gerard, told me later that it was never Gerard's purpose to marry Mrs. Wallace—that he had

never thought of such a thing.

"Her challenging coquetry had, from the first, repelled any regard for her on his part, for he could never endure women who forever thrust themselves and their shallow affections upon him.

"He told no one his reasons for leaving the United States ,nor what had impelled him to go to Quebec.

"Dick mentioned further that he thought it must have been a great sorrow that overcame Gerard, for he had become very unsociable and reticent.

"He had once looked up Mirabeau in Quebec, and really, he couldn't find enough words to describe to me the touching affection with which Gerard surrounded his mother, and the loving attention he continually gave her.

"On the other hand, he said Mrs. Mirabeau did everything possible to distract him and drive away the dullness and melancholy which seemed to pervade his entire spirit—but without success.

"Lillian, can't you see that all this has made me but the more unhappy? I know it—I am sure, that he still grieves on my account, and I— Oh heaven! What would I not do to recall the last miserable years and months, and make good the wrong I did him!"

"Why didn't you write him, telling him frankly and openly what had led you, on that evening, to judge him so cruelly?" asked Lillian reproachfully.

Margaret moaned softly and pressed both her hands to her face.

"I couldn't Lillian, oh, I could not!" she sobbed. "I have often thought of it, but—he despises women who force themselves upon him! One or two such letters I actually did write, but I never sent them—shame forbade it.

"I could never survive his contempt. Who knows

how he despices me now! Oh, I have trampled my happiness with my own feet!"

She began to cry softly.

Lillian sat silent, much grieved for her friend. She well knew that words of consolation, no matter how sincere, were powerless to allay suffering such as now agonized poor Margaret.

Suddenly they heard the bell in the hall below, and immediately after, the maid announced Victor Talbot.

With a cry of delight, Lillian flew into her lover's opened arms, while Margaret Wentworth hastily endeavored to hide the traces of tears on her face.

When he had greeted Margaret also, he turned again to Lillian with a trouble mien.

"My visit to your step-mother," he said, "has been futile, just as I expected. Not a hairsbreadth would she concede. Not only did she refuse to consent to our marriage, but talked of bringing proceedings to get you again into her custody!"

With a low cry, Lillian clung to Victor.

"It must not come to that!" she stammered.

"Don't be alarmed," he reassured her. "I know what to do. Dr. Van Buren, whom I met on the way, has given me the right idea. We need simply to go to Canada, where you would now be of legal age and marry quietly there.

"Mrs. Crawford may rage and object to her heart's content. She cannot possibly have the marriage annulled, but if she is reckless enough to attempt it, she braves an exposure which she will shrink from before she has gone very far."

He squared his jaws agressively.

"But, perhaps she can nullify our marriage," said Lillian timidly

"No, my dear," he told her confidently, "I believe we have nothing to fear. Of course, it is her privilege to object and to take legal steps to try to regain you. Let us grant that she is successful in her proceedings here in the United States, and that she receives a decree confirming her authority over you.

"Her victory would be a very empty one. She would be powerless to compel you to return from Quebec, which is in Canada, and, therefore, beyond the jurisdiction of our United States courts.

"And, of course, we need not confine our residence to Canda. If necessary, we can travel in foreign countries until you have attained your majority and her guardianship expires naturally.

"But to come back to the point, I am sure Mrs. Crawford will resign herself to the inevitable, for she is clear-sighted enough to perceive that the scandal which the story would bring out, would be most detrimental to her social prestige.

"She would not endanger that at any price. However, we need not give these things any thought to-day. The question is, dearest, are you ready to leave for Quebec with me to-morrow?"

Lillian slipped her arm through his and pressed it affectionately.

"Oh, how can you ask, Victor? You know your wishes are also mine. I have no other will but yours!"

Suddenly she sprang from her lover's arms.

She looked for her friend who had quietly stepped behind the curtain to the window and was peering out into the garden below.

"Margaret," she coaxed, embracing her, "I want you to show how great your friendship for me is. Come with us to Quebec; you shall be my bridesmaid! Say you will, there's a dear. You know, Margaret, there is

really no one else I can ask."

The redness of the rose and the paleness of the lily altered in quick succession in Margaret's face. She breathed heavily as though struggling with herself.

Lillian watched her expectantly. She herself was greatly agitated. A thought had entered her mind at which her heart beat faster.

"I will speak to mother," said Margaret at last. "I have relatives at Quebec with whom we could stay, and perhaps I can manage it."

She did not look at Lillian as she spoke, but Lillian fell on her neck with delight.

Her heart overflowed with gladness. Now, that her happiness was assured, she must do all she could for Margaret.

Mrs. Wentworth readily consented, and in feverish haste and excitment the young girls prepared for their journey.

A new spirit semed to animate Margaret. Her cheeks glowed and from her eyes there shone a dark, mysterious something—the dawn of a new hope.

The very thought that she would breathe the same air with the man she loved with al her soul, filled her with nameless bliss.

Chapter 218

MARIE'S DENIAL

THE UNEXPECTED meeting at Oak Manor between Philip Gordon and the woman who called herself Marie Desmond, had all the earmarks of sensational developments. Marie read in his keen and prolonged glance what she feared —recognition. The pallor on his handsome face frightened her. Very slowly he came forward, his one hand extended.

As she touched it with her own, she noticed that it was cold as ice. With her head bowed she stammered a few incoherent words.

"You—you don't know how glad I am to see you," Gordon faltered. "I see," he added, his eyes swiftly wandering toward the children and Annie, "that I am not the only one who rejoices in your return."

"I—I hope you will pardon this intrusion in your home, Mr. Gordon," she answered with forced calmness. "I was passing through this part of the country and I thought I'd stop in for a moment to see the children. Annie tells me that Harry is not well, and——"

"No, he isn't," Phil interrupted with more fierceness than he had intended to put into the words. "The poor boy is far from well. He needs you. I need you. In fact we all do."

Slowly Marie raised her eyes. Determination to keep her identity hidden from this man, possessed her.

"I would like to speak to you alone for a moment, Miss Desmond," was the request that seemed to come from a great distance. "Will you kindly come with me

into the next room."

She inclined her head in assent and followed him. As Gordon closed the door she saw how he trembled.

"Won't you be seated, please?" he coaxed, pointing to a chair.

Marie dropped into the seat, desperately striving to retain control of herself. But she was not prepared for Phil's next move.

It came too swift and too unexpected. He took her face between his hands and gazed searchingly into her eyes.

"Tell me!" he gasped. "For God's sake, tell me who you are?"

What it cost the unhappy woman to utter a deliberate falsehood no one knew but herself. And no other woman did a greater piece of acting.

In a voice that did not even have a tremor in it, she lied.

"Why, I am Marie Desmond, of course," she said calmly. "Who did you think I was?"

Gordon listened to her as in a dream. His heart throbbed so wildly that he was almost breathless.

His gaze was still fixed on the eyes that met his with something like cool defiance. His hands were still pressing her cheeks.

"You are hurting me," Marie complained, removing them. "Do you want me to be sorry I came, Mr. Gordon?"

"No—no!" He stepped back quickly. "But you see, in some ways you remind me very forcibly of—of the woman I loved and lost—my first wife. After you left us and I——"

"Before you go any further, let me tell you that you are mistaken," she broke in as she rose to her feet. "I hope you will be kind enough to excuse me. I must

go on and——"

This time Phil interrupted her.

"Stay at least a few days, Miss Desmond," he pleaded as a hungry boy might plead for something to eat. "You—you don't know how terribly wretched I am. I am not ashamed to tell you that I learned to love you because you reminded me so much of—of my first wife."

Marie felt a sense of satisfaction and triumph, for her anticipation was gratified.

She had not the least intention of leaving Oak Manor and her children. As a matter of fact she had come prepared to stay.

As for Phil's declaration of love, it caused her heart to flutter.

It was good to hear him say it, although she must accept it as Miss Desmond, the governess, and not as his wife.

She met his ardent gaze with well-feigned surprise.

"I—I am really amazed to hear you say that, Mr. Gordon," she declared evenly. "I did not expect anything like that from you—a married man."

Gordon was instantly apologetic.

"Ah, forgive me, Miss Desmond," he begged, desperate. "I know I had no right to speak of love to you. Yes," he went on bitterly. "I am a married man. But I am married to a woman who has made my life a living hell."

Overpowered with emotion he turned and stood with his shoulders shaking. And now Marie faced the greatest temptation she had ever encountered.

Her whole heart went out to this unhappy man, whose arms had sheltered her in the glorious days gone by.

She had but to touch his arm and whisper one word to see him groveling at her feet.

Ah, how she yearned to tell him that she was indeed Marie, his first wife, and not Miss Desmond, a mere governess. But there were conditions that forbade it. Another woman was still legally his wife.

Then there was still that feeling of jealousy rankling in her bosom. Phil must have loved Alice Procter or else he would never have married her.

In a measure he deserved the punishment that was his. But to be near him, to hear his voice and to minister to his comfort and perhaps—here Marie's train of thought suddenly halted.

Everything depended upon what the future would bring.

And much depended upon her willpower. How long she could hold out against these overwhelming odds, only time could tell.

"I am deeply sorry for you, Mr. Gordon," she told him, forcing back the tears that insistently welled up in her eyes.

When a moment later he faced her again, he appeared to be quite composed.

"Perhaps I have done an unworthy thing, Miss Desmond," he said manfully. "I regret having spoken of my unhappy married life to you. It shall never happen again. But won't you let me plead for — for my two children?

"They need your loving care. Won't you come back to them as their governess? I'll gladly pay you anything you care to ask. You can name your own salary, and you can not ask too much."

Marie's smile was pitiful.

"While I was here I learned to love the children," she told him. "Yes, I will stay. So far as the salary is

concerned, you need not pay me any more than you did before."

In a burst of deep gratitude, Gordon seized her hand and kissed it. Again Marie felt tempted.

She would liked to have drawn her fingers through his curly dark hair, streaked with premature gray now. Unutterable compassion dwelled in her eyes.

"Let us go to the nursery now and tell the children the good news," Phil cried suddenly as he straightened up. "Ah, how glad they will be to hear that you have come to stay."

Phil had spoken words of truth. When he introduced Miss Desmond as the old-new governess, there was rejoicing indeed.

"Oh, daddy, I am happy!" exclaimed little Harry, throwing his arms about his father's neck. "Now I know I'll get well again. Miss Desmond can do more for me than the doctor."

Marie stood some little distance away, pressing Phyllis to her bosom. No one observed how the tears stole down her cheeks. Even Annie sniffed.

It was indeed a heart-rending scene. Father and mother; husband and wife, separated by fate and yet held together by an invisible bond, stood hugging the children.

But between them stood the insurmountable wall —Alice, the second Mrs. Gordon.

A week had passed. Happy laughter and song came again from the nursery. The Gordon home was no

longer a breeding place for gloom and disagreeable thoughts.

All the servants seemed to rejoice in the return of Marie Desmond. And the master of the house went about as if in a dream.

He was at the end of his wits. The latest reports from the private detectives in his employ were to the effect that no trace of the first Mrs. Gordon could be found.

But he found strange solace in the knowledge that Miss Desmond was again giving her loving care to his children.

In the meantime his worries branched out in another direction. There was no longer any doubt about his business reverses.

The strike at the copper mines still existed, and it appeared that the money needed for ending the strike and putting the mines in a working condition, could not be found.

It was then that Phil Gordon found out how many real friends he had. Every single one of them, who might have helped him with a substantial loan, turned him down with some sort of an excuse.

He showed plainly how he was worried. The caresses he bestowed upon the children seemed forced.

His occasional laugh had a metalis ring, and his smile could not hide the bitterness in his soul. Again it was Marie Desmond who came to the rescue.

The moment she learned that Phil was in financial difficulty, she got in touch with Mr. Shields and asked him to make an investigation.

Within three days she received a telephone call from the old lawyer, requesting her to come to his office at the earliest possible moment.

Marie made arrangements to leave the children

in the care of Annie, then without Gordon's knowledge, went to Chicago.

Mr. Shields greeted her with the usual kindness, although he seemed to be very serious.

"What did you find out?" she wanted to know as soon as they were alone.

"There is a movement afoot to ruin Gordon," he began, rubbing his chin as he always did when perplexed. "A copper syndicate has been trying to buy him out, and when he refused to sell, they stooped to the most unfair methods I ever heard of.

"A labor agitator was sent to the mines in which Gordon sank nearly all of his money. This fellow, in the pay of the syndicate, fostered a feeling of dissatisfaction among the men.

"The result was a strike. Not enough with that, they destroyed valuable machinery and other property when a demand for a big increase in wages was not granted at once. It is a most unfortunate state of affairs, and I am sorry for Gordon."

Marie bit her lip. Resentment and anger swept over her.

"I understand that it will take at least four hundred thousand dollars to reopen the mines," Mr. Shields went on. "But that is a lot of money. I am afraid Gordon won't be able to raise it. In fact, I know he won't."

For a long moment Marie sat in silent thoughtfulness. It did not take her long to come to a conclusion.

"How much is the estate I inherited from my uncle in Australia worth, Mr. Shields?" she inquired coolly.

He stared at her blankly.

"Why, my dear child, you surely don't mean to—to——"

"How much is it worth, please?" she repeated.

"Oh, at least twice that much," he told her. "Right

now you are close to being the possessor of a million dollar fortune. But I hope you are not thinking about risking half of it for——"

"I'd risk every dollar I own for my hus — for Phil," she corrected hurriedly. "What is that money to me, Mr. Shields? Unless I am permitted to make some good use of it, I don't want it.

"No matter what Phil has done to me or left undone, I love him. I love him more than ever, and I want to help him. I am anxious to help him. I consider it my duty to help him."

The old lawyer grinned sheepishly.

"That is just what I wanted you to do," he said with a short chuckle. "Don't think for a moment that I meant to discourage you. But this is a delicate business Philip Gordon has pride, you know."

Marie gave him a quick glance.

"Of course, I don't want him to suspect that the money is coming from me, you foolish old dear," she exclaimed. "That would spoil everything and give him another clue as to my real identity. You must manage it somehow. You can do it."

"I suppose I could, Marie," came back slowly. "I have always been an admirer of your husband — Phil Gordon, I mean. He is one of the few clean business men left in Chicago, and he is kindly disposed toward me."

"That ought to make it easy then," smiled the woman. "Phil doesn't know how wealthy you are. As a friend you could come forward and offer to help him out of his financial trouble. I will sign a number of checks and you can fill in the various amounts needed."

Mr. Shields shook his head.

"That is too dangerous, my dear?"

"Why?"

"Because we must not forget that you must sign those checks in your right name to make them legal tender," he explained. "Each one of them must bear the signature of Marie Gordon."

"What difference does that make?" she queried.

"Phil might go to the bank which pays the money to him and ask to see those checks. If he saw the signature 'Marie Gordon', he'd surely smell a rat. And yet," Shields added, a slight frown clouding his brow, "it is the only way we can manage it. We might take a chance and trust to luck."

"By all means," she urged. "Let's take a chance. I must help poor Phil. It kills me to see him go moping about the house."

"Alright," the attorney agreed. "Let's get down to business now. Here are a number of blank checks on the First National Bank. Sign them, and I'll do the rest."

This formality was discharged in a few minutes, and Marie, satisfied and happy, too, returned to Oak Manor.

Chapter 21

THE NURSE

DR. VAN BUREN played right into the hands of fate when he took it upon himself to help Mrs. Knight, the young woman whom he found lying by the roadside. It was pure and simple a case of aiding an unusually good-looking young woman in distress.

However, there is no reason to believe that this kindhearted and generous physician would have passed the woman by had she been less attractive.

For if there ever was a man who might truthfully be called a modern Samaritan, Dr. Van Buren was that man.

Innumerable times had he waited on the sick in poor homes without asking for the fee.

And knowing that he would receive no pay for his services, he always did his best to alleviate the suffering of those whom averse circumstances compelled him to take care of.

In the case of the beautiful young Mrs. Knight, Dr. Van Buren was destined to receive a splendid reward.

Incidentally he was destined to be one of the main factors in bringing a guilty murderer to justice, and thus remove the suspicion still resting upon Victor Talbot.

When the physician went to the office of the Associated Charities in Chicago and requested that a trained nurse be sent to the home of the Knights, there was no objection.

However, owing to the long distance from the city,

the younger nurses were reluctant to undertake the task of nursing Mrs. Knight.

Knowing the conditions which existed in the home of the Knights, Dr. Van Buren really did not want a timid young nurse.

In this case an older and experienced woman was needed; a woman who had been in close touch with the seamy side of life and had nerve enough to face a drunken brute of a husband without fear.

Had Dr. Van Buren been inclined to utter untruths, he could have had any number of nurses to take the case. But by stating only facts with regard to this case, every one declined.

Finally he pleaded and scolded. He offered to pay liberally out of his own pocket. It was of no avail.

The chief matron in charge of the Associated Charities, was very anxious to oblige Dr. Van Buren because she knew better than anyone else what a wonderful self-sacrificing physician he was.

While they were discussing the matter, one of the nurses came in. Dr. Van Buren had not yet met her.

Taking it for granted that this one would also refuse to take the case, he shrugged his shoulders disappointedly and was about to leave.

"Wait a moment, please," the nurse called. "I would like to speak to you, doctor."

He turned quickly and smiled.

"I am Nurse Olive Carrel," she said by the way of introducing herself. "I just heard that you want someone to take care of a sick woman out in the country somewhere. I am willing to take the case."

The physician stared at the speaker in surprise.

The impresion she made upon him was most favorable. She was rather tall, but well-formed and graceful. Her features were regular.

Finely chiseled lips and the nose of an artiste bespoke refinement. Her eyes he could not see because they were hidden behind a pair of blue spectacles.

There were lines perceptible about her sensitive mouth which indicated beyond question that this woman had know sorrow and care.

She was no longer young in general appearance in spite of the fact that she was not yet thirty.

Dr. Van Buren was not only surprised. He was mystified. He looked at the chief matron with a question in his eyes.

"You can trust Miss Carrel, doctor," the latter recommended. "I am satisfied that she will handle the situation in a very capable manner. Since she volunteered, I suggest that you give her a chance."

"Who is she?" he asked in a whisper.

"She told you her name, didn't she?" the chief matron countered.

"Yes, she did that. But how in the world did she come to accept the position of a charity nurse?" the physician replied, slanting another glance at Miss Carrel, who stood near the door awaiting his decision. "I dare say she'd look well in a drawing room."

The chief matron shook her head.

"I am not at liberty to tell you anything about the girl," she said in a low voice. "Since her coming to us about a year ago, she has won the hearts of all who came in personal contact with her. She is not only a splendid nurse, but also a thorough Christian woman."

Dr. Van Buren was more mystified than ever. There was something strangely familiar about this Olive Carrel.

But propriety forbid the asking of personal questions at this time.

"I gladly accept your offer, Miss Carrel," he said

aloud, turning to her. "I wish you would make arrangements to leave at once. Here are the directions. I will order a taxi for you in the meantime."

Within an hour Olive Carrel was on the way to Ivy Cottage, as the modest home of the Knights was called.

She rather enjoyed the trip through the open country, and occasionally a reminiscent smile lingered about her sensitive mouth. Apparently she was not a stranger in these parts.

When the taxi finally stopped in front of the cottage, she got out quickly and approached the front door. There was no push-button, so she knocked. When no response came, she knocked again and with more vigor.

Finally a window was opened, and a weak voice inquired:

"Who is there?"

"I am the nurse sent by Dr. Van Buren," Miss Carrel replied.

"Oh, are you?" There was an audible gasp. "I am sorry I can't let you in. My husband has gone and he took the front door key with him. He forbid me to admit anyone."

The nurse frowned, but she was not discouraged.

"But you are ill, Mrs. Knight," she cried. "You must have the proper care Dr. Van Buren has sent me here to wait on you, and I mean to do it. Can I come in through a rear door, perhaps?"

"No, that is locked too," came back in a mournful voice.

Olive Carrel looked at the open window for a few moments. It was rather high from the ground and not easy to reach But she spied an old bench standing under a tree a short distance away.

"Alright," she called cheerfully. "If I can't get in

through the door, I'll take the window."

It was the work of a few seconds to do this. With the agility of a woman used to athletics, she vaulted into the room and stood laughingly before the chair which held the sick Mrs Knight.

"Here I am," she laughed.

But the next instant her laugh died on her lips. Quick sympathy seized her as she beheld a still very beautiful young woman attempting to rise in order to greet her Mrs. Knight's features mirrored intense physical pain.

"Oh, you must lie down at once," Miss Carrel advised "I can see how you are suffering."

Without waiting for an answer, she assisted Mrs. Knight to the bed. It was by no means an easy task to undress one so utterly helpless. But she succeeded at last.

Utterly exhausted the unhappy woman lay back on the pillows.

It was so long since anyone had handled her with so much gentleness and tender care. She breathed a sigh of contentment as the nurse began to busy herself about the room.

Olice Carrel saw two tears rolling down the cheeks of her patient.

From the few words she had had with Mrs. Knight, she already knew that her married life was not a happy one. But she asked no questions.

She well knew that, with time, these heavily-laden souls seek expression to unburden themselves.

An indelicate question at the wrong moment would kill all chances of confidence, and give her no opportunity to exercise her influence.

She must wait until the proper time.

Continued in next number

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